

## MISS MASON'S LETTER.

MY DEAR "BAIRNS,"

I cannot let you meet without a hearty welcome and loving greetings from me. That you should have thought it well to call a Conference of old students is especially gratifying to me, as it is an evidence of your strong, corporate life, and of your sense that not only has each one of you a responsible post to fill, but that you have together a cause to advance worthy of your most earnest, thoughtful, and self-sacrificing efforts.

As a body you have amply and most loyally fulfilled the intention for which the House of Education is established. Your college is proud of you. Many records reach me of good and faithful work, most intelligent methods, and loyal devotion to duty, and, what is more, of the spirit of love, kindness, and loyalty you carry into the various families where you are employed. One thing that I especially appreciate is your freedom from small gossip about those families, and your loyal and respectful recognition of parents as your chiefs for the time being.

A lady wrote to me the other day:—"One does indeed realise, as one watches her work, what your House of Education training does, and how different the whole tone of the education given is—one gets rid of that miserable cramming in of facts and condensed analysis! Then it is so nice to be brought into the schoolroom life and interests—you know one is generally rather resented there and classed among out-of-date machinery."

Another thing I value is the hearty way in which you share the home-life of your pupils in sickness or in health. I know of a good many cases of tender nursing and wise care in difficult circumstances. We do not all get such great chances of being of service, but there are always opportunities, and we can at any rate do some service to the household we are in by being happy. I think you are not a self-pitying set of people, and that you are accommodating, and open to friendly banter—these things are important in

a house. I fear there are just a few of the less qualified and less capable among you, *very* few indeed, who feel themselves injured if they are required to see that a child washes his hands properly. I should advise these to read Mr. Barrie's *The Little White Bird*. That will give them an idea of how loving and thoughtful people regard ministration to children. You cannot do much in the way of personal care because you have other duties which *must* be done, but some measure of this care will always attach to your work, and indeed, it is one of the privileges of family life.

There are one or two questions which are sometimes raised by students entering on fresh posts which I prefer to leave to mutual agreement—holidays, for example, and length of notice.

In the first place, you are on what I will call a "favoured nation" footing amongst working women. The following extract from an article on "The Life of a High-School Mistress" in *Women's Employment* (for February 6th, 1903), illustrates what I mean. After enumerating the advantages of such a position under the headings of interest, independence, and opportunities of influence, the writer enumerates the drawbacks:—"The work is hard, very hard, too hard. The weary, deadening part of it is the corrections—piles of books to be gone through and marked day after day, so that, by the time they are done, the mind is too jaded for any freshness or originality of thought to be brought to bear on lessons, and so the teaching suffers. . . . Often the heaviest part of the day's work is done out of school, and many a mistress works four or five hours or even longer in correction of exercises and preparation of lessons. . . . If the mistresses had not to spend so many hours in the soul-destroying work of corrections, we should not hear of so many breakdowns. . . . Salaries are, and have been for years, steadily declining. . . . Insecurity of tenure is the other special point which must be mentioned as a drawback."

Your work is also profoundly interesting, full of great opportunities for character formation, usually fairly rich in means of culture, conversation, books, pictures, &c., and, at the same time, you work under singularly happy and healthful conditions. You share the exercise and recreations of the children, and in all the years of our existence as a college I do not recollect one case of breakdown from over-



work; and when I have the pleasure of seeing old students, I rejoice to see them free from the harrassed, worn look so common amongst educated working women. The good and well-chosen food of the schoolroom table has a good deal to do with this happy state of things.

Again, as to salary, I believe that governesses who go out from the House of Education, are, *cæteris paribus*, the best paid among women workers.

It is for these reasons that I think you are on a favoured footing amongst women who work (a most favoured footing amongst women who do *not* work). But this happy state of things, which I know you appreciate as gratefully as I do, calls for a certain *quid pro quo* on your part. I do not think, for example, that you have the same claim for long holidays at a given date as the worn-out High-School Mistress. As a matter of fact you do usually get the school holidays, and those of you who do not fall into the ways of the family with cordial good will; but it is well that we should look at the facts of the case, and not try to make unyielding stipulations on taking up a new post. You are almost always received with great kindness and friendliness into the families of your pupils. For this reason I do not think too stringent business arrangements about length of notice are desirable. A gentle and friendly spirit of give and take is your best safeguard. If you are ever aggrieved by "insecurity of tenure," the extract I have quoted shows that you are not the only people so aggrieved. A good governess is a treasure jealously guarded, and, as many of you know from experience, she keeps her post for years. I think you will agree that students of the college receive, on the whole, most generous treatment.

I should like to add a word on the subject of rise of salary. Some people expect such a rise as a right after a few years' work, without showing any addition to their former qualifications. If you think that experience itself is a qualification, I do not find it so regarded. It is always easier for me to place students who have just finished their training, than students who have held posts; and, may I say, there are perhaps three or four rolling stones among the total number of ex-students whom it is almost impossible to place. They go to a post, they leave it, they write (sometimes in an amusingly imperious way) to say they are ready for another.

But those of you who chanced to read a letter in the *Journal of Education* some little time ago, from a lady who had applied for a post as morning governess in London, and found both sides of the street, the doorsteps, the hall, the dining-room black with applicants (most of them probably well qualified), will know that not even an Ambleside training, if it is not followed up by good and faithful work, is any security for employment. By the way, I have met one of that London crowd, and am told that the case is not overstated.

Another thing that you must bear in mind as to this question of a rise in salary is that people pay higher salaries to you in the first place than they do to any except to that highly-accomplished person, a foreign "finishing" governess, and, therefore, unless you take real trouble to acquire say a new language, or increased musical power, there is no particular reason for raising your salaries. But I have in my mind only two or three not very successful people. As a rule your employers are generous, and you are by no means grasping.

Should any of you think well to advertise for posts, you must let me know before doing so, in order that I may not send you posts at the same time. I should not like it at all if an offer from me crossed an offer through an advertisement. I do not greatly advise this course. A lady may see that a House of Education student wants a post. She has heard great things about H. of E. governesses, and writes, but the advertiser has little to offer, does not get the post, and does a little to lower the college. It has been well said that if we look upon God as an Exactor and not a Giver, exactors and not givers we shall ourselves become. Now I have reason to believe that my dear "Bairns" recognise generously that they *receive* "full measure pressed down and running over." Such a recognition makes us generous givers, singularly free from what I call the "trades-union" spirit of reckoning up your services. You are not given to count up jealously the hours you teach and the hours you are with your pupils as if such hours were hours of bondage; rather, I think, that most of you do not consider these matters at all. On the other hand, if any stray person should feel that her little world is too much with her, that she needs some time to herself, do not let the matter become



a grievance, but talk it out at once, frankly and kindly, with the mother of your pupils. You will find her, in almost every case, quite open to conviction, and ready to arrange for the leisure you feel you need. Most of you live the family life and share the family recollections so entirely that this sort of thing settles itself.

I am very glad to see from your programme that you are going to discuss the *Parents' Review* School. You work the School extremely well, and are very loyal and enthusiastic about it: so do a large number of governesses not belonging to our body. But it is to your hands that I feel the School is committed as a Cause. It is our contribution to National Education; and we are about to make a great effort to make its scope and efforts widely known. I had meant to say a good deal to you about the School, but I have promised to prepare a paper for the P.N.E.U. *Conversazione* in June dealing fully with the subject, with a view of bringing it before the Heads of Schools, and as you will no doubt read that paper I will only now commit the School *in toto* and as it stands, to your always loyal support.

You will remember that there is no other scheme of education framed upon our great principle that *Education is the Science of Relations*, and that the more relations a child establishes within each of the groups into which we divide school work, the completer and the happier will that child's life be. Possibly each one of you may feel that she is herself competent to devise a scheme which should give due, just, and ordered opportunities for a child's several affinities. I do not say that any one of you could not do this, but it is a great thing to do, and must be the outcome of a good many years of thought, research, and experiment. Meantime take the School as you find it, and work for it for all it is worth. Do not pick and choose among the subjects, but give to each its appointed time. The time taken from one subject and given to another is usually time wasted; and in the Practising School, which has more disadvantages to contend with, in the way of weekly change of teachers, than any of you can have, all the subjects are covered, nothing is crammed, and the result, when school girls come into the College, is exceptional intelligence and capacity. In the Government "Special Report" upon Preparatory Schools, it is stated by one writer, that boys from the P.R.S. always

do well—a compliment for which I think you deserve much credit. One word more and I have done. The question of registration has no doubt come before you. Very few of you could be ranked in "Column B," as having graduated or passed some other of the examinations which are taken as equivalent. Nor am I anxious to have the College recognised as a Training College for persons qualified for "Column B." I think it would mean undue pressure upon you either before or after training, and in either case a drain on the vitality which you owe to your pupils, if theirs is to be a living education. For these examinations mean, in almost every case, a long course of cramming for preliminary examinations which lead up to the final effort. For that reason we have never offered inducements to "girl graduates" to come to us for a shorter term of training, fearing they would be too much exhausted by previous efforts to take in all we have to offer. But I think you need feel no anxiety. You are trained on the lines which parents value for their children, and I think they do not value the rather stereotyped qualifications of the registered teacher: indeed, I have had more applications than usual lately from schoolmistresses for assistants who are not "the usual thing."

It has been said that as all qualified nurses must be registered, so must all qualified teachers; but the cases are different. Medicine is so far an exact science that doctors look for certain definite and limited qualifications in sick nurses. Education covers a far wider field, and is not an exact science. It would be hard to define certain qualifications as the best and most necessary that a teacher can have. You, dear friends, at any rate have a fair field. Your certificates are more and more valued by the public, and I think the good and faithful work that you have done and are doing, gives you and your College a surer place in the public regard than any form of registration.

I should like to add words about the points I always touch on in our farewell talks—the duty of saving, and the duty of reading, for example; and, above all, the duty of cherishing and sustaining in yourselves the spiritual life, which is all too apt to burn low: but I must not keep you any longer from the work before you.

Let me finish as I began, by saying how greatly touched I am by the tender loyalty which brings you to confer under



the shadow of the old "House." God grant that you may go back with higher aspirations, quickened enthusiasms, and increased vitality of body, mind, and spirit.

Your always affectionate friend,

(Signed) C. M. MASON.

### MRS. FIRTH'S PAPER.

I suppose I may fairly assume that by asking me to open your Conference to-day, you put me to some extent in the position of an adviser, and I want to assure you at the outset that I think there is much truth in the axiom, "He who can take advice is sometimes superior to him who can give it" (Von Kuebel).

It is pleasant to me, however, to add whatever weight my age and influence can give to some thoughts which will find an echo in your own minds, and to some ideas which you are already trying to work out. I respect your efforts and characters: your meeting here shews you to be in earnest, you wish to strengthen yourselves and each other, to tighten your hold of all things lovely and righteous, and to think together on whatever things are true and of good report. One result of this dwelling on the heights of character and conduct will be a feeling of shortcoming and of self-reproach. Very salutary it is—and, on the whole, best unexpressed. It is quite consistent with a certain amount of happy satisfaction in our work, and it is far removed from morbid self-depreciation.

Let me, by the way, say to you, Learn to speak while you are young: women are coming more and more to the fore, and they should be able to express what they wish in few and graceful words, to persuade with good temper and to meet opposition calmly. Some of you, no doubt, can do this, or you belong to debating societies, and will learn to do so. I had no such advantages, and, as you see, I cannot speak, I can only *read*.

I want to put in a plea for correct English: we should

respect the beauty and dignity of the language we inherit. Don't you think we have a duty towards it, and that we should not help to degrade it? Slang usually takes a word from its lawful use, and connects a lower idea with it. I don't think people need be considered too precise who forego the use of such words. The use of slang, like a good deal of what is called swearing, often shews a want of power of discriminating expression. School boys and young men brothers may not always be the best people to dominate the language and set the fashion of speech. It is not necessary to use such words as "bike" and "rot" and "beastly," or to "hurry up," even though "awfully," "awfully," "awfully" tempted to do so.

There is *much* in a name! I scarcely think that a rose by any other name *would* smell as sweet . . . Shakespear notwithstanding. Do you think it would? Then as to writing, even letters, it is worth while to wait for the word which exactly fits your meaning, and so cultivate sincerity and correctness. There is no doubt an immense improvement since a Mr. Tilney in one of Jane Austen's books remarks, "As far as I have had opportunity of judging, it appears to me that the usual style of letter-writing among women is faultless except in three particulars." "And what are they?" asks the young lady; and he replies: "A general deficiency of subject, a total inattention to stops, and a very frequent ignorance of grammar!"

But let us pass on. It is interesting, cheering, and deeply solemn also, to consider the influence which those now before me must exert, and to recall the many, not here, who have gone out from this place, who are influencing children in so many families, helping to educate future citizens, helping to train future mothers. How important each individual is! This passage from the Vow and Creed of Mr. Ruskin's Society of St. George might with advantage be appropriated by each: "I will daily endeavour to raise my own body and soul to higher powers of duty and happiness, not for rivalry or contention with others, but for the help, delight, and honour of others, and the joy and peace of my own life." How much there is in personality! If one of you were common-place, selfish, trifling, without high aims, it would not be loss only; it would be weight in the opposite scale.